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Media Release

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Attorney General Biden and Lieutenant Governor Denn Announce Plan to Combat Cyberbullying

Wilmington – Attorney General Beau Biden and Lt. Governor Matt Denn today announced a plan to put in place an effective statewide policy to combat cyberbullying in Delaware's schools. The plan includes statewide public hearings to gather information to be used in developing the cyberbullying policy, and legislation designed to help school districts enforce the new policy. The plan consists of four steps:

1. Statewide public hearings in April to gather factual evidence from school administrators and parents about the type of off-campus activity causing disruption in our schools.
2. The drafting of a statewide cyberbullying policy based upon the evidence gathered at the hearings.
3. Issuance of a regulation by the state's Department of Education requiring adoption of the statewide cyberbullying policy by public school districts and charter schools.
4. A new state law that will allow the Attorney General's office to defend school districts and charter schools if their good faith enforcement of the statewide cyberbullying policy is subject to legal challenge.

"Thanks to constant communication and social networking, there is no such thing as a 'schoolyard bully' anymore," said Attorney General Biden. "Kids who face bullies face them all the time – at home, at school, and everywhere in between. For schools to be the safe places that children deserve, they must be able to effectively fight bullying that may originate off school grounds, but follows its victims 24 hours a day."

"We need to fight cyberbullying aggressively but also thoughtfully," said Lt. Governor Denn. "Around the country, schools have been sued when trying to enforce cyberbullying policies – and even here in Delaware, the one school district that attempted to implement a cyberbullying policy was threatened with litigation. This approach, where we gather the facts first, write a policy based on those facts, and then stand behind the policy with the full force of our Attorney General's office, will give us the best chance to deal with this growing problem."

The legislation necessary for implementation of this plan will be introduced in the Senate this week by Senator David Sokola, and will be sponsored in the House of Representatives by Representative Terry Schooley. Senator Sokola and Representative Schooley are the chairs of their chambers' respective education committees, and the prime sponsors of companion legislation they introduced with the Lt. Governor and Attorney General earlier this month addressing the reporting of bullying incidents.

"A lot of the kinds of controls that have worked in other media haven't been as effective in the on-line world because of instantaneous and permanent nature but we know some things have worked," said Sen. David Sokola, D-Newark, the bill's leading sponsor. "And we can't give up; we need to look at what's being done to successfully curb cyberbullying elsewhere and use it here."

"In this age of technology, young people use many different forms of social media, computers and cell phones to communicate and publicly post information," said Rep. Terry Schooley, D-Newark. "Unfortunately, these means of communication can be used to bully other young people in a more public way than previous generations could ever imagine. By introducing this legislation, we are trying to stay ahead of the curve and protect our children and grandchildren from cyber-bullying and let people know that bullying in any form is wrong and should not be tolerated."

Hearing dates, times, and locations for the statewide public hearings follow. They are open to the public, with school administrators being asked to testify first to share firsthand experiences. **Written input is also welcome and may be emailed to emily.cunningham@state.de.us**

New Castle County

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

10:30am – 12:30pm

Carvel State Office Building – auditorium

820 N. French Street

Wilmington

Sussex County

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

5:00pm – 7:00pm

Sussex County Administrative Building

2 The Circle

Georgetown

Kent County

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

11:30am – 1:30pm

Kent County Levy Court Chamber

555 Bay Road

Dover

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